

FERNGLEN NATIVE PLANT GARDENS NEWSLETTER

Spring 2023

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News from Fernglen

text and photos by Kelly Hayward

Some people can naturally draw a crowd. Ranger Glen is one of those people. During the last school holidays in September, Ranger Glen and Dan Marrow of Auckland Council hosted, at Fernglen, Auckland Parks Junior Rangers Explorer Walk. About 35 children and their families partook on what turned out to be one of the holiday's better weather days.



Ranger Glen had families captivated as he lead the charge, calling out items of interest like glow worms, kumarahou/*Pomaderris kumeraho* – demonstrating its use as bushman's soap. One stage of the walk was dedicated to a non speaking period of silence, this peaceful time had children focused using their other senses on the surrounding environment. The following week, on the 4th of October, it was a pleasure to see Fernglen named Park of the week on Auckland Council's Parks Facebook page, giving Fernglen exposure to its 12,000 followers.



Ranger Glen demonstrating bush man's soap



Holiday park rangers walk

A few weeks later 15 teenagers from St Mary's Youth Group arrived at the Saturday working bee for 2 hours of fitness, carrying mulch in old coffee sacks and buckets to Ben's Ridge. They were easy going and we were impressed with their strong work ethic and valuable contribution.





Recently a botanical tour group from Connecticut, USA visited and a children's birthday party filled the gardens with a vibrant buzz. Curator Deborah and dedicated week-day volunteer Ngaire have the gardens looking manicured, the native ground covers especially splendid as are the flowers of Poor Knights Lily/*Xeronema callistemon*, carmine rātā/*Metrositous carmine*, *Pomedaris hamiltoni* to name a few.

Thanks to the Fernglen committee and trust members, Fiona from Pest Free Kaipatiki, Athena from St Mary's Youth group and many others who have assisted with the recent events, your efforts have assisted greatly.

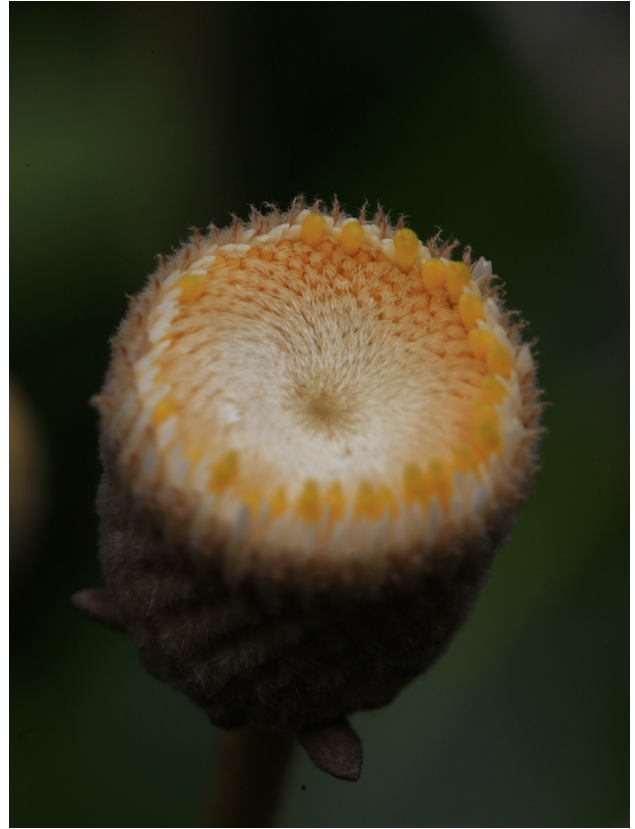
Merry Christmas and best wishes for 2024,
Kelly



Metrosideros carminea – carmine rātā



Malborough rock daisy, *Pachystegia insignis*



Malborough rock daisy bud, prior to opening



Jovellana sinclairii



Pratia puberula



Pratia puberula closeup

The Impact of Nine Months Continuous Rain on Native Plants

by Neville Arbury

Throughout 2023, a common comment made at our monthly working bees has been “*The gardens have never looked so good!*” This can be attributed to a number of factors, but certainly the amount of rain that has fallen in many instances has encouraged strong, vigorous, healthy growth. Nikaus are a classic example, they are popping up almost everywhere throughout Fernglen, and existing specimens have grown. This year at a rate never previously observed! Of course, there are some downsides to all the rain, either observed at Fernglen or in other native gardens throughout Auckland. Pittosporums in general have struggled with the very wet conditions, as have Olearia species. When growing in volcanic soil (i.e. free draining) problems are often lessened but in more typical clay soils death has often occurred. Interestingly native street trees, especially the common tītoki have thrived. Usually by March, April these trees often poorly planted in clay soil are really struggling. Not so this year.

The real winner of all native plants this year has been *Griselinia littoralis*. Commonly planted as hedge plants, when they dry out they die out! Tens of thousands die every late summer as the soil becomes too dry to sustain them. Other species to struggle include a number of *Pseudopanax*, especially *Pseudopanax arborea*. They really dislike a high water table. Of all our native trees, the puka, *Meryta sinclairii* was the most adversely affected by the continuous rain. The impact was quite dramatic and sadly irreversible. Leaves quickly faded to a very light green, then the leaves would droop on branches and eventually fall to the ground, signifying the death of the tree.

Ferns in general thrived in the exceptionally wet conditions, although some tree ferns that were standing in waterlogged soil for a lengthy time responded with fronds turning brown and eventually falling to the ground. The obvious question is, what happens next? If the soil rapidly dries out and we have the long, hot, dry summer as is predicted, what impact will this have on many of our native plants? The challenge may well be how to equalise the growing conditions in a garden, i.e. how to prevent the soil becoming too wet in winter and too dry in summer. This may well include improving the drainage in gardens and mulching heavily in summer.



The miro, *Prumnopitys ferruginea*, has benefited from the rain

The Importance of Street Trees in Hanoi, Vietnam

by Neville Arbury

As a regular visitor to this beautiful city, I have always been impressed with the planting of street trees, both in the older parts of the city, and further out in the newer areas of Hanoi.

The importance of street trees cannot be overemphasised in helping to make Hanoi a liveable city with summer temperatures often over 35 degrees and humidity above 90%. The cooling effect of large canopy-shaded trees is immense. Food vendors, fruit, vegetables and drinks are invariably underneath large trees. Likewise, when it rains (and it pours) the trees provide some shelter.

Many of the street trees are very old, especially in the old quarter. In the early twentieth century, the French planted tropical trees from their other colonies, including poinciana, bauhinia and African mahogany. After the war of independence (1954) president Ho Chi Minh encouraged large scale tree planting throughout Hanoi. His famous quotation was *"To reap a return in ten years, plant trees. To reap a return in one hundred years cultivate the people."*

Tree planting is held annually in Hanoi in spring. The recent target is to plant more than 300,000 by 2025. When the poincianas and bauhinias are in full flower they must look quite spectacular.

The Flowering Kumerahous in Auckland This Spring

by Neville Arbury

The magnificent *Pomadorris kumerahou* at Ben's Ridge defies age by continuing to grow and flower year after year. Normally this species has a limited life span of 4-5 years! Kumerahous can be quite fickle to cultivate successfully. In over twenty five years of experimenting with kumerahous at my Mangawhai Heads property, I can only report very mixed results. After many years of planting in various sites, seedlings are beginning to appearing in the garden. Unfortunately, kumerahous are seldom seen for sale in nurseries and garden centres as they can be quite difficult to propagate.

Thirty years ago or more, kumerahou plants were a very common sight on the side of roads. Around the outskirts of Auckland, Albany, Coatsville, Kumeu, Ranui and Silverdale. All these areas were resplendent with the yellow flowers of kumerahou. In September, early October with the arrival of the herbicide glyphosate and the spraying of roadsides by councils, a large proportion of the kumerahou population was destroyed. Now in these areas you will only see isolated specimens and the occasional pocket of kumerahous.

Pomaderris kumerahou should not be confused with its close relative, *Pomaderris hamiltonii* that has a more limited natural distribution and grows significantly taller. There is a superb specimen of this species at the entrance to Fernglen that flowers prolifically in September, early October.

There are a number of other species of the genus pomaderris in the old garden. While they tend to be comparatively short-lived, a specimen of *Pomaderris rugosa* survived for quite some time.



Pomaderris hamiltonii - pale-flowered kumerahou with kowhai – *sophora chathamica* tree at Fernglen entrance

The Remarkable Ngaio at Fernglen

by Neville Arbury

Very near the education building is a very old Ngaio tree, *Myoporum laetum*, the sole Ngaio in the gardens. The exact origin of this tree is not known. It has always been there in my thirty years of involvement with the gardens. As individual plants of the species can be quite variable, it is accepted that this is an unusual form of *Myoporum laetum* with its distinctive canopy shape. At one time it was thought that the tree was a hybrid of *Myoporum laetum* and *Myoporum decumbens*, but recently the prostrate form, *Myoporum decumbens* has been reclassified as a variety of ngaio, rather than a separate species. While the tree has been pruned over the years to allow access through nearby paths, the rounded shape of the tree is the result of the plants natural growth.



Ngaio, *Myoporum laetum*, in front of the education building

Myoporum laetum is mainly a coastal plant found on both the main islands as well as the Chatham Islands. A related species grows on the Kermadec Islands. Ngaios are fast-growing species, reaching up to ten metres. While the juvenile leaf is a dark green colour, adult leaves can vary in colour from a yellow green to dark green. Flowers are white with purple spots and as the tree ages the bark becomes corky in nature.

Ngaios have been introduced to a number of different countries, including Portugal, South Africa, Namibia and the United States. Along with pohutukawas, ngaios are thriving in the San Francisco area. It is considered an invasive exotic species by the California Exotic Pest Control Plant Council. Interestingly, a very similar species, *Myoporum insulare* from Australia was introduced to New Zealand as a garden plant in the 1950s and it is quite possible that governor George Grey received some plants in 1870 and planted them on Kawau Island where he attempted to establish his own zoo.

A Visit to the Hanoi Botanical Gardens

by Neville Arbury

Bach Thao Park – Bach Thao Park translates to hundreds of plants. The ten hectares that comprise the Hanoi botanical gardens are home for many endemic tree species, as well as other tropical trees. The gardens were established in the late nineteenth century. As French botanists discovered new species in Vietnam, the gardens became a repository for these plants. At the same time other exotic species were being introduced to Vietnam from French colonies to be planted as street trees, in parks and in large private homes.



Neville under the enormous *Ficus benjamina*

The botanical gardens are a balance of large/old trees, lakes and grass (a very coarse bladed grass, not to be walked on!). There are also extensive areas of mondo grass. Many of the older specimen trees are festooned with epiphytes, either ferns or orchid. Very common is a fern that that closely resembles the bird's nest fern, *Asplenium nidus*. The largest tree I encountered was a massive *Ficus benjamina*, multi-trunked and enormous.

In one corner of the gardens there is a collection of teak trees, *Tectona grandis*, with their very distinctive large leaves. While teak does not grow naturally in Vietnam, plantations have been planted in various parts of the country since 1976. This same area has a number of trees with buttress roots and very straight trunk. Unfortunately, these trees were not labelled. While many trees throughout the gardens have labels in Latin and Vietnamese, this is one area that could be improved.



Neville pruning *Murraya paniculata* in Hanoi

I had last visited the gardens four years ago, before COVID stopped my annual visit to Vietnam. The gardens had changed very little, continue to be well maintained and provide a peaceful haven in a city of over nine million. Well worth a visit for anyone spending time in Hanoi.

The Reinvention of the Former Taupō Native Plant Nursery

by Neville Arbury

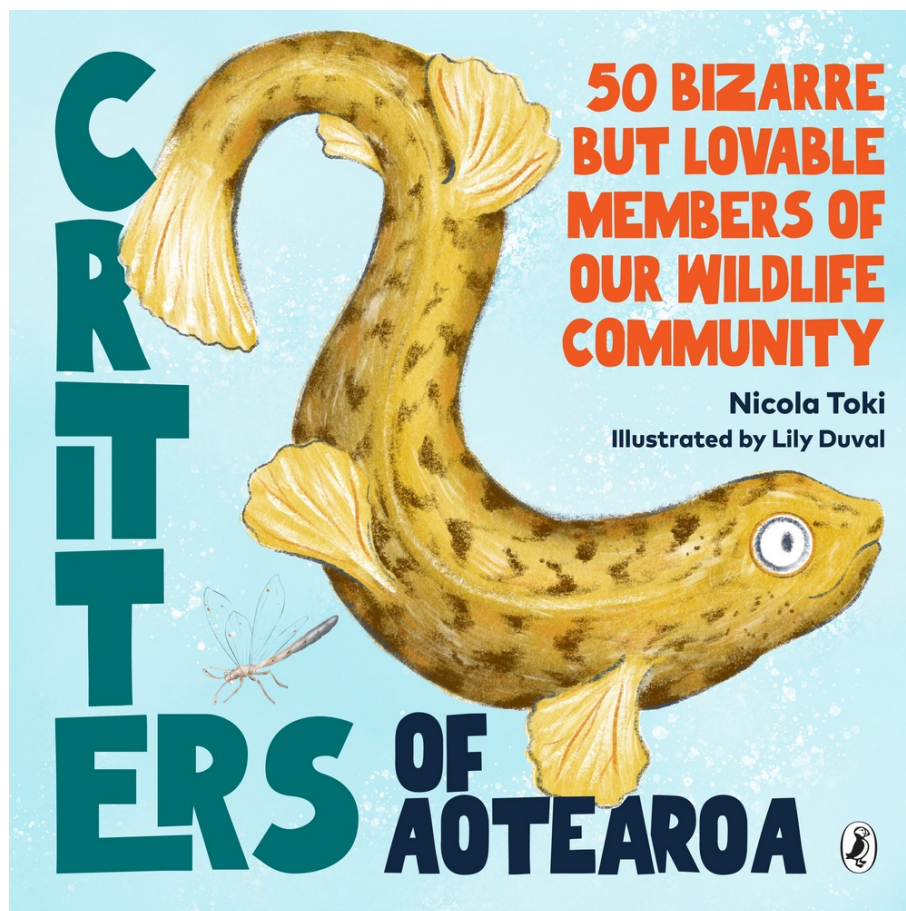
Very sadly in 2018 the excellent native nursery at Taupō closed after many years of growing native plants for both, the hydro-electric dam sites on the Waikato river and later for re vegetation programmes in numerous parts of the North Island. In the early years of Fernglen, the nursery was a regular supplier of rare native plants, especially for the planting of Ben's Ridge in the early twenty-first century.

The new project for this former nursery is to grow and distribute fruit and vegetables from the twenty hectare site, as well as building up a seed bank of edible and medicinal native species. The aim of He Tipu Limited is to grow over 100,000 plants annually for riparian and regenerative projects. This will include the employment and training of staff in all aspects of seed collection, propagation and plant care.

It is hoped that local councils and other groups support this project. With the existing infrastructure of greenhouses, water tanks, irrigation and administrative buildings there is an excellent starting point for this new enterprise.

Book Review: *Critters of Aotearoa – 50 Bizarre but Likeable Members of our Wildlife Community* by Nicola Toki and Illustrated by Lili Duval

by Neville Arbury



This fascinating book poses an important question, how to create interest in unattractive insects that require conservation. The aim of the book is to raise awareness of these many endangered species. While we are familiar with some of the species outlined, in this book, there are many that have until now remained “off the radar”. Some of the more fascinating include the dog vomit slime mould, the Sinbad skink, the native mole cricket and the giant knobbed weevil.

Beautifully illustrated, this book describes over one hundred of our bizarre wildlife members. Each illustration has a special note outlining a particular unique feature of the species, as well as a text providing relevant information. Author Nicola Toki describes herself as a nature nerd. As a child she kept tad poles, caterpillars and praying mantis as pets. She has worked for the Department of Conservation as a threatened species ambassador and became chief executive of Forest and Bird in April 2022.

What I particularly like about this publication is that its format means readers of all ages can enjoy its contents. I will certainly be purchasing additional copies for some of my grandchildren as Christmas gifts.

Very highly recommended, and outstanding publication.

What's Happening at Fernglen?

Working bees

Regardless of the weather, working bees occur at Fernglen **on the second Saturday of every month from 9am onwards, until about 12 noon.**

The working bee is a great way to meet others, learn more about native plants, weeds and pest control. There is always a job to be done in the garden or in the education room.

No gardening experience is necessary and all ages and abilities are welcome. Gloves and gardening tools can be supplied.

Looking forward to seeing you there.

Educational tours

Are you involved with a school or an education group and would like to learn about New Zealand native plants? A unique collection of plants from all over New Zealand grows at Fernglen. To see what is on offer please contact us

on email: fernglen.nz@gmail.com

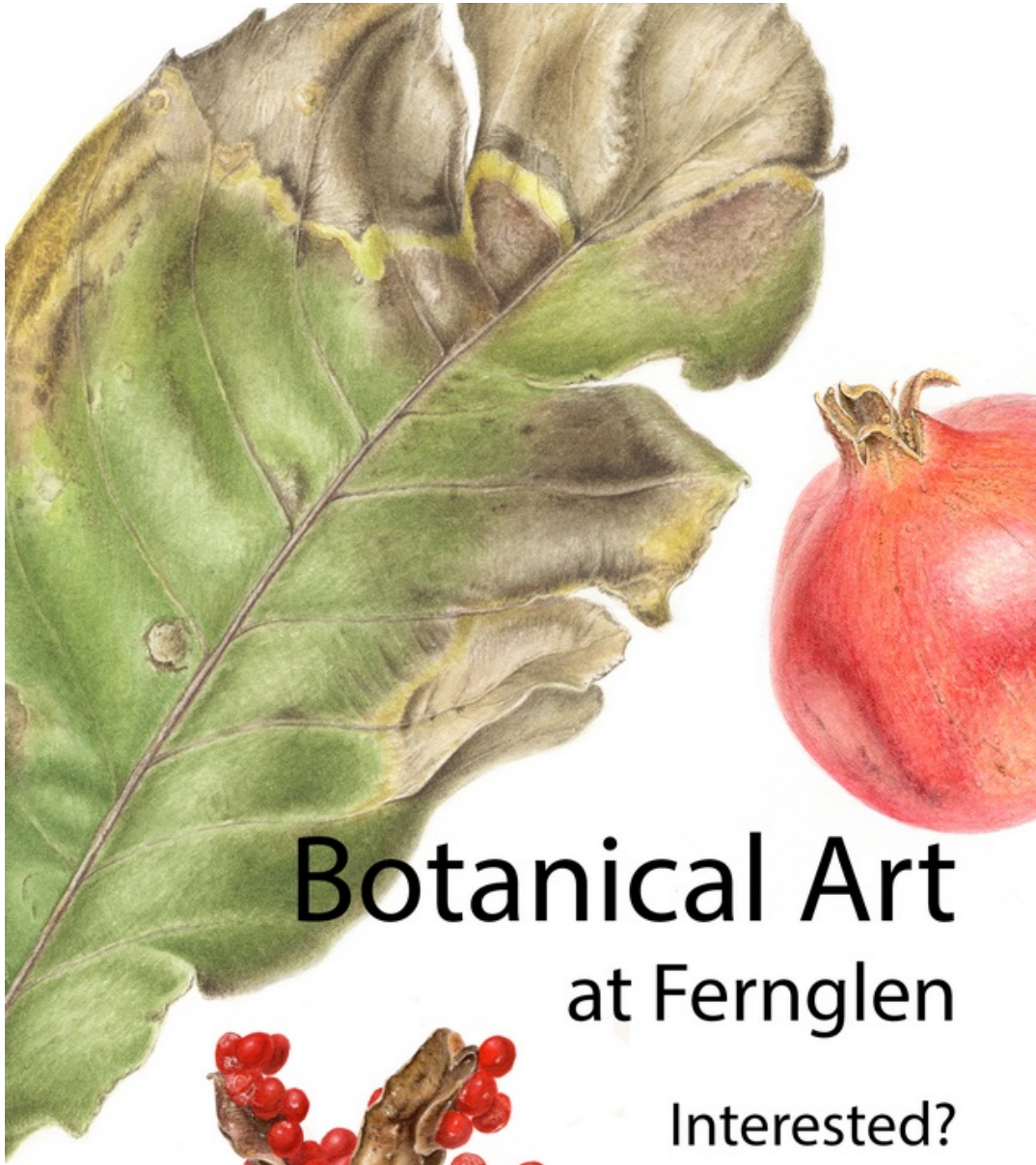
or phone: 021 236 5800

Room hire

The Fernglen Education Room is available for hire at very competitive rates. Please contact us

on email: fernglen.nz@gmail.com

or phone: 021 236 5800



Botanical Art at Fernglen

Interested?

contact
Lesley Alexander
021 161 7070 or
email lesley.alexander.smith@gmail.com

Naylor Love

Naylor Love are committed to seeking sustainable construction practices. Their history in New Zealand makes an interesting read on their website:

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